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AUTHOR Canniff, Julie G.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of a cohort of seven beginning high school teachers, all of whom were in their first year of teaching in schools where low performing students were at the greatest risk and where a culture of professional learning communities was rare. Teachers were struggling with what it meant to be a culturally responsive teacher through participation in a cohort or network that allowed them to stretch the boundaries of what they had done before. Only one teacher participated in professional cohorts in the school, so they reconstituted the cohort from their preservice program as a network. Teachers worked with rural, low-income students and/or English as a Second Language students. Each teacher was committed to culturally responsive practices that set high standards for their students and challenged the school culture, which did not provide them support or validation as new teachers. Data were collected via focus group interviews. Results affirmed the value of a certification program that made explicit the informal theories that teacher interns brought with them into a teaching career, transforming those beliefs and assumptions into informed theories. Professional learning communities helped new teachers with unconventional approaches that actually reached their students (Contains 37 references.) (SM)

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Taking It To The Bone:
The cohort as context for novice teachers validating culturally responsive beliefs and practices

Julie G. Canniff, Ed.D.
University of Southern Maine
jcanniff@usm.maine.edu

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Introduction

Kevin is a second year teacher at Oceanside High School who teaches four blocks of social studies to heterogeneously mixed classes. He is also a recent graduate of the University of Southern Maine's post-baccalaureate teacher certification program - the Extended Teacher Education Program (ETEP). ETEP prepared him to plan, deliver and assess instruction that is aligned with Maine's Learning Results for students in ninth through twelfth grades. Kevin's beliefs about teaching, initially articulated during ETEP, are transmitted to his students through very clear expectations about how they will be successful in his classroom. His students know that they are seen as individuals, responsible for making their own life choices. Because of this, they also know that Kevin expects them to be informed, to have opinions, and to express themselves. His students can test the boundaries of their beliefs, because Kevin is committed to the notion of a classroom where it is safe to express strong opinions.

> [There is this kid] in my class who has the social skills of a dock strike, but he was also the catalyst for a lot of the conversation . . . when he was not there it would be a drier discussion [because] he would say some things that would be so outrageous that he would get people into it. He was doing it because that is who he is. It was not like this lovely coming together; there were times when people said stuff that cut really to the bone. I allowed them the freedom to express themselves . . . they were stretching the boundaries and realizing that it is still okay. You may have gone a little too far in comparison to what you have done before, or what you have dared to do before, but it is still all right and you are safe. It is very authentic . . . I call it, like, to the bone. They go to the bone (Kevin, 1.25.02).

The novice teachers in this study work in classrooms with students who are recent immigrants, students whose families are homeless, whose parents work in factories, whose siblings are on drugs or are teen age parents, or who come from families with professional careers and post-graduate degrees. Regardless of the different cultural capital the students bring to the classroom, each of these teachers is required by Maine law to make sure his or her students demonstrate proficiency on a constellation of standards for their content areas. Maine also requires that students will have multiple measures to demonstrate proficiency, from traditional pen and paper tests to performance exhibitions, by the time they graduate from high school. Built into this structure is also the assumption that every student will graduate with the same knowledge and skills. In fact, the evidence from years of research, is that students from low income and linguistic minority families have different experiences in the public schools from their middle and upper-middle class peers. Teachers rarely have the opportunity to engage with this research or examine their own bias about the potential of different groups to meet the higher level expectations of a standards-based curriculum. As Jean Anyon (1981) points out, teachers make assumptions about students based on their own background and tend to favor the students who are most like their own social class.

This study examines the experiences of seven beginning teachers and the pedagogy that informs their practice. Each of these teachers is committed to a culturally responsive set of practices that set high standards for their students as well as challenge the school culture which does not provide them support or validation as new teachers. The teachers in this study have continued to struggle with what it means to be a culturally responsive practitioner through participating in a cohort or network that allows them to stretch the boundaries of what they have done before. With the exception of one teacher, none of these beginning teachers participate in professional cohorts in their schools, so they have re-constituted the cohort from their preservice

program as a network and this network serves to validate their changing identities as teachers, experts, and change agents. Some of the questions they have brought to the group include:

- Is our teaching consistent with our own cultural beliefs, norms and values?
- Are we modifying our beliefs to survive in the school context
- Do we actively work to validate the cultural identities of our students?
- What kind of school context helps you to be the kind of teacher you want to be?

The research question that guides this study is: *How has a group of beginning teachers supported their induction into teaching by transforming their pre-service cohort into a place where they confront and validate their beliefs and practices with low income and linguistically diverse students?*

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, I will describe the connection between a preservice teacher certification program where norms of inquiry and reflection become part of a cohort culture, and the ways in which these norms have been sustained through each teacher's induction period. A second objective is to define the criteria for a culturally responsive pedagogy and document the beliefs and practices held by the seven teachers in the study. Finally, I will discuss the impact of culturally responsive practices on students who typically have not been successful in school, and the impact on school cultures which persist in reproducing non-collaborative cultures among staff and administrators.

Conceptual Framework

Why do low income and linguistic minority groups do poorly in school? Is it a lack of middle class norms and discourse in their homes? Is it that the parents hold different criteria for success? Is it a persistent stereotyping of these groups throughout twelve years of schooling resulting in teachers' low expectations of students? Is it inappropriate and culturally

disconnected instructional technique within the classroom? Huerta in her doctoral dissertation, Teachers Matter: Humanizing Pedagogy for Latino Students (Huerta, 2002, May) analyzes the literature on pedagogy, practices and effective teachers for low income and linguistic minority students. The approaches that she considers the most effective with all students fall under the rubric of culturally responsive (Villegas, 1991; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

My study draws on Villegas's work to define the context for culturally responsive teaching. According to Villegas, teachers who lack sensitivity to cultural differences misinterpret behavior, underestimate students' true potential, and once these students are consigned to a low achieving group, they rarely move up the academic ladder. Erickson points out that students who are stigmatized in school by race or social class often come from families or communities who experienced the same things in school. A student who resists that negative identity may refuse to learn. However, if the parents and students believe in the legitimacy of the teacher and his or her philosophy of teaching, the student may learn new cultural styles without resistance (Erickson, 1987, December).

Another task is for teachers to understand the different criteria for success held by parents and members of the communities from which their students come (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986); (D'Andrade, 1987); (Strauss, 1992); (Le Vine & White, 1986); (Canniff, 2001). For instance, in many communities being successful is represented by a culturally coherent set of schema that value norms of affiliation as opposed to norms of individualism and competition. Thus, it is part of the teacher's responsibility to teach explicit skills and knowledge that give students the cultural codes which open the gates to middle-class society and institutions without demeaning the students' culture or background (Nieto, 1998); (Ladson-Billings, 1995, Summer); (Delpit, 1995); (Anyon, 1981).

This study is also informed by the literature on cohorts (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992, Oct/Nov); (Beck & Kosnik, 2001); (Meyer & Achinstein, 1998, April), on professional learning communities (Feiman-Nemser, 2000, January); (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999); (Barth, 1990); (Little, 1992), collaborative inquiry groups, (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001); (Bullough & Gitlin, 1994) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). A core principle in the University of Southern Maine's teacher certification programs (TEAMS - undergraduate and ETEP - graduate) is the cohort as a structure for defining one's professional identity, inquiring into the art and science of teaching, and reflecting on the coherence between one's philosophy and one's practice. As stated by Cochrane-Smith, 1999

> Teachers learn primarily in inquiry communities and/or networks where participants struggle along with others to construct meaningful local knowledge, and where inquiry is regarded as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning and schooling (p. 278).

Cohorts that are organized as critical friendship communities, such as the one in this study, offer the participants opportunities to confront multiple points of view and give individuals a safe space to examine their assumptions about kids -- "because of our shared history, reciprocal relationship, ethic of care and interdependence, do our practices fit our values?" The cohort is a generative and supportive place for beginning teachers to sustain preservice habits of heart and mind (Meyer & Achinstein, 1998). Is this a place where individuals make their beliefs about success for students explicit and document those beliefs through examining examples of student work -- particularly students that have not experienced much success in academic settings (Fieman-Nemser, 2000)? USM's teacher training program gave these individuals many opportunities to confront their previous identity as career professionals and opportunities to reflect on assumptions about kids they brought with them into the classroom. Teacher training that focuses exclusively on technical mastery ignores the reproductive power of teacher bias to

perpetuate low expectations for low income and linguistic minority students. "Novice teachers need ongoing support to continue exploring self and context (Bullough & Gitlin, 1994:70)."

Setting

The seven teachers in this study work in six high schools located in southern Maine. Knight High School and Sebago High School are based in rural communities whose economy is a combination of agriculture, tourism, and seasonal, small businesses. Springvale High School is located in a small, inland town that includes a manufacturing plant and other large companies which draw workers from a wide radius. Oceanside High School and Thacher High School are located in small towns that are dotted along the Route One corridor running along Maine's coast. The economy of Oceanside is primarily service related as it experiences a nearly year-round stream of tourists; the economy of Thacher is dependent on small factories, one or two technology companies, service businesses, and a private university. Both communities have a wide range of socioeconomic groups including wealthy coastal residents, working-class families and a growing refugee community. Finally, Park Middle School is located in Forest City. The school serves students who live in the inner city, and who are primarily from Forest City's growing immigrant population. One out of four students is in the English as a Second Language program and many of these students are also identified for special education services.

Every year the Maine Educational Policy Research Institute compiles extensive data on Maine's public schools. This year's report, The Condition of K-12 Public Education in Maine, 2003, reveals that the per capita personal income of Maine residents is around $27,000 -- the lowest of the three New England states and places Maine 36th in the nation. The majority of Maine citizens make their income from wages and salaries, and the persistent reliance on seasonal jobs and low-wage employment create a large body of low-income working families, "their income put them barely above the poverty line but their actual standards of living may

actually fall below the poverty line because such families generally do not qualify for public assistance (Thompson & Silvernail, 2003:3).

Since the early 1980s Maine has been resettling refugees from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Eastern block countries, and more recently Maine has been receiving increasing numbers language minorities through secondary migration within the United States. The report states that "in 2001-2002, the public school population included 4,337 students who spoke a total of 82 different heritage languages (p. 17)." [Forest City] and neighboring cities . . . have enrolled the highest concentration of Limited English Proficient students. These districts also report that between 22% and 30% of their students are eligible to received subsidized school lunches. Maine consistently places at the top of the nation for people who have attained a high school diploma (89%). However, Maine places below the national average for individuals who complete a bachelor's degree or higher (24%). The report predicts that of the 18,000 ninth graders who entered school in the 2002-2003 school year, only 5,400 of them will earn a college degree early in their lifetime (p. 33).

Another statistic that has been steadily increasing is the dropout rate. The state identifies a student as a dropout as one who has "left school without completing a state or school administrative unit approved secondary program (p. 76)." The dropout rate in Maine's southern-most counties ranges from 2.62% to 3.31% .

This study interprets "culture" broadly to include not only race and ethnicity but social class as constituting socially constructed realities that may be different from the normative Euro/American, middle-class, protestant mainstream. The majority of native Mainers are rural, working-class folks, however, there are pockets of affluent, elite professional communities along Maine's coast. In the major cities there are families from Africa, Southeast Asia, Central

America, and the former Soviet Union living among 'native' immigrants from England, Ireland, Germany and French Canada. Teachers who have developed a culturally responsive pedagogy, are aware that their students bring multiple world views into the classroom, along with diverse learning styles and a range of abilities.

Sample

The seven participants in this study graduated from ETEP in June, 2001. There are four social studies teachers (one at an alternative high school), two English Language Arts teachers and one Spanish teacher. Their average age is 35 years. All have come from other careers including insurance executive, lawyer, health services, and the non-profit sector. The teachers have been selected, in part, based on the following criteria:

- They are first year teachers in secondary schools where low performing students are at the greatest risk, and where a culture of professional learning communities is rare.
- They are working with rural, low-income students and/or English as a Second Language students.
- They demonstrated a high proficiency in reflective, critical inquiry during their internship year.
- They live within a close geographical radius.
- They are committed to participate in the new research cohort for two or more years.

The seven teachers come from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences and they each describe their decision to become teachers with similar phrases -- "education was highly valued in my home," "I wanted a career where you give something back and make a difference in a child's life," "I wanted to make the world bigger - broader for my students."

Kate's family has lived in Maine for more than seven generations and she identifies strongly with Maine values of self-reliance, independence, and participatory democracy. Prior to entering ETEP, Kate worked for a large insurance company and was recognized as one of five specialists in her field. She teaches social studies as part of the ninth grade freshman team at Oceanside High School and she teaches a course in the World after 1945 for a class of sophomores. Her colleague at Oceanside, Kevin, also teaches social studies to sophomores and juniors. He has a law degree, and worked for a number of years with non-profit organizations before becoming a stay-at-home father while his wife launched a new pediatric clinic. Kevin has lived in Maine for ten years.

Renee was born in Missouri and came to Maine with her parents and six siblings at age five. After retiring from a medical career, her father began a new career as a professor in anatomy and physiology at the University of Southern Maine. Renee, who has a second masters in American and New England Studies, made a short transition between graduate school and ETEP. She teaches social studies at Sebago High School and is also part of the ninth grade freshman team. Taylor was also born in Maine, spent her early childhood in Toronto, and returned to Thacher where she graduated from high school. She is the first person in her immediate family to graduate from college and complete a post-graduate program. Prior to entering teaching, Taylor served as the computer consultant for a K-2 school outside of Forest city, and she maintains a part-time job as a lab assistant at the local hospital. She teaches English Language Arts at Thacher High School to sophomores and juniors, and has launched a school newspaper in the past year.

Audrey teaches eighth grade English at Park Middle School where at least a third of her students speak a language other than English. She served for nine years on the Forest City school committee and was chair of the school committee during her last term. Audrey has been a

newspaper reporter in Forest City, an adult education teacher and a volunteer for a number of non-profit organizations. She has lived in Maine since 1977. The summer between high school and college, Suzanne ventured to Peru with her sister and decided to stay for two and a half years. She traveled through 13 South American countries, stopping to work in Argentina for a while. She returned to complete her education as a nutritionist, and prior to entering ETEP, Suzanne was the health coordinator for a local Head Start program. She teaches Spanish at Knight High School and is part of a team of foreign language instructors each of whom are affiliated with one of the houses in this Coalition school. Suzanne has lived in Maine since 1977.

Finally, Cory teaches at Springvale High School in the Alternative Education Program. He works with a small group of students grades 9 to 12, and teaches a mixture of social studies, English and geometry. Cory is a member of the Professional Ski Patrol Association and prior to entering teaching, he was employed full-time for one of the Maine ski areas -- patrolling the slopes and educating guests on skiing safety. During the summer, he worked as the chief mate for the Maine Maritime Academy's sail training program, teaching novices to handle traditionally rigged sailing vessels. Cory moved to Maine when he was seven years old, and considers himself to be a native of the state.

Data Collection

This is a longitudinal case study (Stake, 1995), and the data collection is derived primarily from focus group interviews. Data collection for this study began in the summer after these teachers completed ETEP, and had all found positions as first year high school teachers. I initially invited five participants to be part of a focus group that had two objectives: 1) to debrief their ETEP year and solicit recommendations for the upcoming cohort, and 2) to invite them to participate in a long-term research project. The purpose of the research was to understand what

being successful meant to each of them as they transitioned from former careers into high school teaching; and what norms of success they would transmit to their students.

The cohort has met nine times since August, 2001 for an average of four hours for each meeting. The meetings include a meal, sharing and discussing student work, and group interviews around a short protocol that focuses on questions about success, teacher beliefs, and culturally responsive practice. The focus group discussions are audiotaped and transcribed; Field notes are written during and after these sessions. I have observed three teachers in their classrooms and have written field notes, observation notes for each visit, and videotaped one 80 minute class. Part of every meeting includes an examination of student work. I use a protocol common to Critical Friends Groups (developed by the National School Reform Faculty project) such as The Critical Incident, The Collaborative Assessment Conference, or the Consultancy. The work provides a powerful window into the teacher's planning around content and skills, and his or her choices about how to differentiate the assessment to meet different students' needs.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows the inductive, interpretive method favored by grounded theorists(Erickson, 1986); (Strauss & Corbin, 1998); (Maxwell, 1996); (Wolcott, 1990). The central premise of the method is that the researcher's interpretations must include the "perspectives and voices of the people she is studying (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 274)." The interpretation is both an analysis of what people say, what they mean and what they do.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe a way of "restorying" the text by requiring the researcher to pull out the instances where a participant answered a research question and crafting a narrative representation based on their words (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Variations of this contextualization strategy include case studies (Stake, 1995); (Mishler,), crafted profiles

(Seidman, 1998), and voice centered method (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). For this study, I read each transcript five times in response to different analytic questions on cohorts, teacher beliefs, concepts of success, cultural narratives, and the ETEP experience. Narrative that responds to each question is highlighted with different colors in the transcript and is later chunked into a matrix that allows me to see cross case themes. The chunked data is then run through Hyperesearch©, a qualitative research software in order to develop small cases around specific themes, and extract clusters of codes . The codes provide another lens from which to look at the ways the participants' understand the concepts of cohorts, teacher beliefs and cultural practices. The final narrative is organized around a single research question and is given to each participant to respond and comment on the analytical stance.

Findings

A. How are norms of inquiry, reflection and analysis of beliefs sustained through the induction period by transforming a preservice cohort into a professional learning community?

In 1988 a core group of teacher education faculty at the University of Southern Maine framed a set of program design principles and a set of teaching standards for beginning teachers. The design principles were heavily influenced by John Goodlad who argued that the preparation of new teachers and the professional development of veteran teachers should be undertaken as a partnership between a university and a particular school district (Goodlad, 1984; Goodlad, 1990). The ETEP standards for successfully completing the program are based on the INTASC standards and attend, specifically, to the particular needs of beginning teachers.

The structure of ETEP is based on four core principles which serve as both philosophical and pedagogical foundations for the preparation of effective teachers. The first principle is a commitment to the cohort as the context for developing a culture of collegiality. Through group

norming processes, weekly seminar meetings and building-based collegial clusters, interns develop their professional identities within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The second core principle is the application of a performance-based assessment system that is based on reflective practice and collaborative inquiry. The assessment system provides a body of evidence for teaching competency through reflective journals, an in-depth student case study, goal-setting conferences, teaching units, videotape reflections, field visits, and the presentation of a professional portfolio documenting competence in the twelve ETEP standards. The assessment system also requires the intern to begin articulating personal philosophies of teaching, classroom management, and curriculum development. These initial statements help define one's professional identity and establish the principles upon which each intern bases his or her teaching practices.

The third core principle is full immersion in the daily life of a classroom setting for eight months. Interns are responsible for doing lead teaching in each of their placements amounting to a total of six weeks. The fourth core principle is the integration of university methods and theory courses with their ongoing classroom experience. Through continual reflection on student work and student engagement, the intern reflects on the theory they are building and tries different approaches to improve student achievement.

Although the seven teachers in this study work in different schools, the continuity of their pre-service cohort has meant that the norms of engagement among them are long-established -- everyone's personality is familiar as are the norms of discourse. They expect that whatever they bring to the group -- issues around difficult students, collections of student work, confrontations with administrators -- will be approached with compassion and with professional judgment.

Two elements that have carried over from their pre-service program are the frequent revisiting of their professional teaching philosophies around the relationship between practice

and student engagement. The cohort discussions continually challenge their beliefs about the ways children learn, the influence of community norms on student engagement or achievement, and what constitutes success in their classroom. The tuning protocols that focus on collections of student work, foster intensive inquiry into thinking about differentiation for their marginal students and offer options to explore.

When asked about the impact of the preservice cohort on their beliefs, Kate states,

> The process of going through ETEP helped me to sort through who I wanted to be as a teacher and how I wanted to be in my classroom, the kinds of relationships I wanted to have with my students, the depth of material I wanted to expose them to and what they could developmentally handle or what I needed to do to make the work palatable. [The cohort was so valuable] because we needed so much to share with each other, to hold out our own experience and coach each other through other experiences.

Each of these teachers affirm that the cohort continues to help them sort through their beliefs and the practices that support their beliefs. However, now the students in their classrooms come from cultural contexts unfamiliar to some of these teachers. The cohort sessions have fostered frank discussions about the irresistible urge to label their "low level" students as incapable of learning. Renee, who has had the most difficult induction into her setting, confirms the role the cohort plays in helping validate her beliefs,

> This [cohort meeting] revives me and makes me realize that I am doing this for a reason. It is not to please my administrator, and I still feel like the oddball in my school. [But] it just gives me the validation that I am doing what I should be doing. I can't tell you how many times Kate, for whatever reason, you will say a comment that I will carry with me. So when I have an activity and I ask 'why;' what is the skill you want them to learn?

> And that will be in the back of my mind to plant seeds that will challenge me to take the next step (2.7.03)

Finally, the cohort has evolved from a homogeneous group all experiencing the same program expectations, to a collection of individuals all teaching in contexts with vastly different educational philosophies. Each of them bring stories about the ways in which school cultures can be responsive or not responsive to the induction of new teachers. Cory's experiences in the alternative education program and Audrey's experiences with her eighth grade refugee students expand the boundaries of what culturally responsive teaching really looks like. In Renee's words,

> Cory is building a bridge [to his students that is different from mine.] There is a direct route you could take to build a bridge [to your students] but Cory is way over here. He thinks differently than I do, but every time I have a conversation with him I walk away with a different perspective and I get to see things from a different angle.

B. What are the ways in which the beliefs and practices held by the seven teachers in this study reflect a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Huerta (2002) identifies the following elements as consistent with a culturally responsive pedagogy:

- Teachers develop *political clarity* (Bartolome, 1994) in which they become aware that schools transmit the culture, values and norms of the dominant society and are able to understand students' performance in schools as part of the cultural capital they bring to the learning process.

- Teachers emphasize the power of individual agency for their students by drawing out their prior knowledge and experiences, adding new knowledge to these concepts while validating the original perspectives. At the same time, teachers become agents for themselves as experts on their own experience.
- Teachers take students' culture and their questions seriously by integrating examples from their history and background into curriculum, and providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge in authentic ways to authentic audiences.
- Teachers ensure that all students acquire the knowledge bases and discourse styles of the white middle class, giving them the skills to cross cultural borders if they so choose. Social scaffolding is considered as important as a rigorous curriculum.

In their educational philosophies, the seven teachers included such beliefs as the importance of forming strong relationships with students, and the conviction that all students can learn. Over the course of two years, as the teachers came in contact with students whose backgrounds did not prepare them for the grammar of schooling, their beliefs have become more accommodating to multiple views.

From the beginning, Kate has expressed a strong stance for social justice in her beliefs and in the way she interacts with her students,

> I think there are a lot of people who get sold short, people that we don't invest in. We are too good at writing off people in our society who could add so much more to the world. [When you are teaching] you need to go back to who you are. As hard as my experience was teaching in _____ it was by being who I am that I reached some of those kids . . . some of the ones that other people said were not reachable (9.7.01).

A big part of "being who she is" is Kate's belief that her students can be excellent, so she sets her standards high, creates innovative ways for students to engage with historical events, and dares them to persist,

> I know this sounds idealistic, but if you don't ever know that you can [strive to hit excellence and hit it], and that is what I see in my kids every day is that feeling of, "Oh Mrs. __, just let me off the hook. Come on." They say I'm so hard. "You give us so much work to do." And I just listen and say, "I know you can do this. I know you can do it and I am here to help you every single step of the way (1.25.02)."

Kevin approaches his students with a defiantly oppositional stance in which he challenges them to take sides, form opinions, be controversial. Kevin reasons that if he can get them to be passionate about something they may be inspired to learn about it. He persuades them that there is a certain kind of power in knowing you can stay the course in an intellectual debate with one's teacher.

> My style is totally different. The reason I dressed up as Socrates [on the first day of school] was for them to know that I was the weirdest cat. 'You are probably not going to be louder than me . . . you may be, but you are not going to be weirder than me.' And once you establish that, I felt like I can go from here because they know I am out there and that to me is every bit as important as whatever else happens. Everybody comes up with their own solutions of how to get through the day (10.5.01).

Kevin makes a point of listening to his students and frequently asks them to evaluate an assignment, or give feedback on their preferred learning style. He helps students build real world skills, particularly around media literacy, that he expects them to use whether they are college bound or not.

Audrey is fortunate in that her middle school is organized as an Expeditionary Learning School. Taking the concepts of experiential learning pioneered by Outward Bound, teachers design "learning expeditions" for students that last from six to eight weeks and revolve around challenging projects, fieldwork, or service and culminate with public performances or publications. Audrey designed an 'expedition' for her eighth grade students during the fall of her first year which required each student to investigate his or her immigrant history, and then locate and interview an adult in the community who had recently immigrated to Forest City. For some students, the narratives opened their eyes to experiences they could not imagine, for others the interview and the subsequent story telling was a catharsis validating their knowledge. In the process, the students gained confidence in the complex, and often treacherous craft of communication.

> The only thing that got my kids to settling down was giving them a journal and letting them write their hearts out. They are in shelters, gangs, kicked out of their house and DHS is coming. I got a very different view of my kids and the kids are so trusting in their journal. For 15 minutes every day they write their hearts out and these are kids that do not want to have anything to do with English, with writing, but for those 15 minutes I can get them in. I started relating the stuff that I am reading with the short stories that I am teaching. They are responding, talking, having discussions. It is not all the time, but I feel like I am productive and they are learning something (10.5.01).

While these seven teachers might not define their beliefs as culturally responsive, the principles that underlie their philosophies of teaching inspire culturally responsive practices. However, it is in the way that they define what it means to be successful for their students that one can see the coherence between their beliefs and their practices.

C. How does a culturally responsive pedagogy set the standard for students who typically have not been successful in school, and for school cultures which are non-collaborative and demeaning to new teachers?

The primary objective of the cohort meetings has been to grapple with the notion of success. I continually probe for the links between their personal standard for what constitutes success, and what they transmit to their students. When the cohort participates in a collaborative review of student work, this question comes up with regard to the products in front of us -- what does distinguished work look like? If a student did not meet that standard, were they successful in other ways that could not be measured?

In August, 2001, Audrey, Taylor, Renee and Kate said that success for them was being viewed as a leader, knowing how to get things done, knowing how to motivate people, and having a vision and acting on it. Taylor stated that success is the self-confidence you get through making your own discoveries, "the trial and error, this works, this doesn't work, oh, this works really well . . . finding out that there is another way to do something and being able to show kids how to be successful by trying different strategies (8.3.01)."

Taylor transmitted her notion of success to all her English students who, initially, refused to believe that there was much to be gained through trial and error. However, by November the students in Taylor's lowest tracked class were competing for bonus points in a vocabulary game where the level of difficulty was constantly escalating. Because everyone had a chance to win bonus points, those who were successful with the game began helping others win bonus points as well.

> It is definitely a community thing where the kids that have come up and gotten their bonus points; they want to be a part of that. They are like, 'just give it a shot, Ms. __ will help you.' I basically told them that the cards were magic and every time you have the

> hardest card and you are the last person, you have to find a way to do it. . . When they finally get a higher level question or an abstract thought, I am just like cheering, like going crazy. . . My kids have so little success in school -- that last block -- the little bit of success they have had is like intoxicating to them and they are just striving every day to get better (11.9.01).

Kate summarizes the notion of success that she transmits to students as "I think it is realizing they have their own minds and that what they think has value. . . We are trying to teach them how to push themselves, how to stretch themselves. . . . I think success is when a kid realizes that they can do something that they didn't think they could do before (1.25.02)."

The reality check for most of the cohort came at the end of the first term when some of their students failed in spite of many accommodations, incompletes and conferences. As they discussed these failures with their cohort members, Taylor, in particular, reflected on the standards she had set for her all her students and the ways in which her students took risks to achieve them (or not),

> I think I have really seen success this week and it is not the kids that I have now, it's the kids from last semester. There was this one kid in my Academic Skills class who was a sophomore taking a freshman class over again. He has done poorly, made Ds . . . [basically] has not had a successful high school career to this point. He did nothing the entire semester until I gave them a research paper where they could pick the topic. I did it like an "I Search" format where they had to reveal what they knew about the topic before. This kid, who knew how to blend into the wallpaper, wrote a paper on illegal street racing and it is probably the best piece of writing that I have ever seen at the high school level.

> He is not going to pass the course even with the A+ on the paper, but I wanted to know why he went through the whole research paper; why he did the whole thing. He said, 'It was the only thing that was important to me this year.' I told him, 'you are a gifted writer. You are so good you could write for a career.' He is a voc kid, who is in auto mechanics. I don't think anybody has ever said anything like this to him ever before. So today I just felt, WOW, this is why I am in high school; this is why I am doing this (1.25.02).

The cohort members validate their peers' struggles to reach students like the one Taylor describes, and support them through the trial and error process. Inevitably, they all learn something that influences their own practice, and that becomes the topic for a future discussion.

A second, but equally dynamic, thread in their discussion about success has to do with applying culturally responsive principles to the contexts in which they teach. According to Maine law, all teachers who are new to a district, whether they have taught for many years or are just beginning, are placed on probation for two years before they are appointed to a continuing contract with that district. For beginning teachers, this is often perceived as a "walking on eggshells" experience. For this cohort, it is especially frustrating. They are self-identified leaders and have taken initiatives to implement much of the culturally responsive philosophy they acquired during the ETEP year such as persuading the social studies freshman team to use student-led conferences, designing a set of common assessments that recognize different learning styles, finding the resources to increase the media literacy of students, taking the lead on standards-based grading and reporting, or starting a student-led school newspaper.

With the exception of Suzanne who is in a context that values cross-discipline and cross-grade collaboration, the other members of this cohort have faced overt opposition and criticism for their efforts. Believing that collegial inquiry around practices that inspire teachers and motivate students should be the essence of a school culture, Kate, Renee, Taylor, Kevin and

Cory are angry that the system continues to perpetuate an atmosphere of fear, judgment and threat. Taylor discussed the principal's severe censorship of her newspaper; Renee is frustrated by her department's willingness to teach to the minimums and "dumb down assessments' so that kids can pass; Cory comments on the perception that the kids in his program are at an academic dead end, and Audrey reveals that she has received a negative evaluation from the vice-principal, but no one has taken the time to mentor her as she struggles with a classroom full of students half of whom have IEPs and a third of whom do not speak English.

Kate, who supervised a department of employees in her past life, is incredulous that her school culture perpetuates a climate where people are always having to prove themselves to authority figures who function more like inquisitors than coaches.

> I see this thing that is not cool in the whole system which is that it turns on itself and eats its young. If you are a wounded animal in that system, you better find a place to hide. I have managed people, and when people are in trouble or aren't performing you coach them either through the situation or out of the position, but you don't attack them.

School cultures must be responsive to the expertise and experience new teachers bring to their buildings just as teachers must set aside labels and stereotypes and search for ways to inspire all students to meet their standards.

Conclusion

This study is important to the research on teacher preparation and induction for a number of reasons. First, it affirms the value of a certification program that makes explicit the informal theories teacher interns bring with them into a teaching career, and transforms those beliefs and assumptions into informed theories. These informed theories are particularly powerful when working in urban, low-income and/or immigrant school communities. Second, the study documents the work of professional learning communities in helping new teachers to experiment

with unconventional approaches that actually reach these students. And third, the study is poised to enter the discussion of standards and accountability. New teachers, as well as veteran teachers, need to understand how other cultural groups display knowledge and how to use a variety of methods if we, truly, are to leave no child behind. Kate spoke for the cohort as she articulated a vision that met their standards for a school culture that would, truly, be responsive to students, teachers, administrators and parents --

> If you could be part of a professional learning community. . . . think about our fantasy, if you will, of having a school that we all taught in. Imagine the possibilities of having administrators who were cheerleaders and facilitators; advocates who went out there and fought for the cause. Imagine what it would feel like.

For now, the cohort serves this function for Kate, Kevin, Suzanne, Audrey, Renee, Taylor and Cory, and is powerful in breaking through the isolation that all of them currently feel. Renee announced at the last cohort meeting that she had applied for a non-teaching job driven primarily by not wanting to continue teaching in the negative culture in her building. Three days after the cohort meeting Renee emailed her cohort members the following statement,

> At first I left our last gathering feeling, to be honest, sorry for myself and sad. But after about a day I started to rethink things and realize that there is no reason that I have to buy into the disciplinarian, authoritarian, filling the bucket...philosophy that is so prevalent at my school. That's not me or my style and I think my school needs more people like me there. I wanted to let you know that instead of feeling sorry for myself, I see it as an opportunity to maybe make some changes.

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